

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L QUITO 3123

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT EC

SUBJECT: ECUADOREAN POLITICAL FERMENT CONTINUES

REF: A) QUITO 2719 B) QUITO 3055

1. QUITO 2719 OF APRIL 22 REPORTED THAT CIVILIAN OPPONENTS OF THE REGIME HAD BEEN ORGANIZING A SERIES OF "POLITICAL COCKTAILS" AS A WAY OF RALLYING ANTI-GOVERNMENT SENTIMENT. THAT MESSAGE ALSO REPORTED THAT A MAJOR SUCH COCKTAIL, SPONSORED BY THREE EX-PESIDENTS AND MORE THAN TWO HUNDRED SUBSCRIBERS, HAD BEEN SCHEDULED AT QUITO'S COLON HOTEL FOR APRIL 24. THAT EVENT WENT OFF WITHOUT GOVERNMENT INTER-FERENCE. IT WAS WELL-ATTENDED AND WIDELY PUBLICISED, AND GAVE AN AMPLE OPPORTUNITY FOR THE RENEWED POLITICAL EXPOSURE OF SUCH OLD POLS AS FORMER PRESIDENTS CARLOS JULIO AROSEMENA, CAMILO PONCE ENRIQUEZ, AND OTHERS WHO SIGNED THE ADS ANNOUNCING THE TRIBUTES -- VIRTUALLY A "WHO'S WHO" OF ECUADOREAN POLITICIS. THE ANTI-REGIME CONTENT OF THE POLITICALLY-ORIENTED SPEECHMAKING WAS NOT CAMOUFLAGED: FORMER PRESIDENT VELASCO IBARRA'S MESSAGE, SENT FROM HIS EXILE IN BUENOS AIRES, READ "I SALUTE THOSE OF YOU WHO FIGHT ON BEHALF OF HUMAN DIGNITY AND THE ECUADOREAN PEOPLE AGAINST THOSE WHO HAVE HAD THE INSOLENT TO IMPEDE THE LEGITIMATE ELECTIVE PROCESS..." AROSEMENA
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SPOKE OF "FREEDOMS WHICH ONE DAY WE ENJOY, ANOTHER DAY

WE DO NOT, GRACIOUS CONCESSIONS OF A MILITARY GOVERNMENT, WHEREAS IN REALITY THEY ARE IMMANENT RIGHTS INHERENTLY BELONGING TO ALL MANKIND."

2. ALTHOUGH GOE CHOSE TO IGNORE THESE POLITICAL COCKTAILS, THEY HAVE NOT BEEN SO INDULGENT TOWARDS OTHER OPPOSITIONIST ACTIVITIES. AS ALREADY REPORTED (QUITO 2719), ON APRIL 18 THE GOE ISSUED AN ORDER FOR THE ARREST OF JULIO PRADO, COLUMNIST FOR EL TIEMPO, FORMER FOREIGN MINISTER, AND OUTSPOKEN CRITIC OF THE REGIME. MINISTER OF GOVERNMENT REAR ADMIRAL ALFREDO POVEDA SAID HE WANTED TO QUESTION PRADO IN CONNECTION WITH DOCUMENTS PRADO HAD REFERRED TO IN PRINT ACCUSING THE GOE OF EXTRAVAGANT AND EXORBITANT EXPENDITURES, HINTING AT CORRUPTION. PRADO HAS APPARENTLY SLIPPED OUT OF THE COUNTRY, PROBABLY TO COLOMBIA, BUT WHEREEVER HE IS, HE IS OBVIOUSLY NOT INCOMMUNICADO SINCE HIS COLUMNS CONTINUE TO APPEAR IN EL TIEMPO.

3. NEXT, THE GOE MOVED AGAINST TWO LESSER POLITICAL FIGURES, GERMAN ALARCON JARAMILLO, AND ENRIQUE GALLEGOS, FOR THEIR ALLEGED ROLE IN THE DISTRIBUTION OF FLYERS SAYING CERTAIN JOURNALISTS WERE ON THE GOE PAYROLL. GALLEGOS, IN EARLIER YEARS, WAS A FIGURE IN COMMUNIST YOUTH AND STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS.

4. FIANLLY, THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY, THE MOST OUTSPOKEN POLITICAL ORGANIZATION IN RECENT MONTHS, HELD A RALLY IN THEIR PARTY HEADQUARTERS IN DEFIANCE OF A GOVERNMENT BAN ON SUCH MEETINGS AFTER BEING DENIED A REQUEST TO USE THE GOE LEGISLATIVE PALACE AS A SITE FOR THE MEETING. MINISTER OF GOVERNMENT POVEDA SPECIFICALLY CALLED ATTENTION TO THE BAN BEFORE THE MEETING, BUT THE CONSERVATIVES WENT AHEAD ANYWAY AND MET IN FORCE ON APRIL 25TH IN WHAT WAS LABELLED A "PRIVATE SESSION." SPEECHMAKING CENTERED ON THE THEME "OPPOSITION SHALL BE STRENGTHENED, BUT IT WILL BE BY OPEN CONTACT, RATHER THAN BY CLANDESTINE OR SUBVERSIVE MEANS." THE GOE MADE NO EFFORT TO INTERFERE WITH THE MEETING ITSELF BUT SIX DAYS LATER ARRESTED DR. JULIO CESAR TRUJILLO, NATIONAL SECRETARY OF THE PARTY, AND BANISHED HIM TO AN ARMY OUTPOST IN ECUADOR'S ORIENTE.
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IF PAST EXPERIENCE IS ANY GUIDE, TRUJILLO WILL BE HELD FOR A MONTH OR TWO AND THEN QUIETLY RELEASED. IT IS DOUBTFUL THAT HE WILL BE MISTREATED.

5. THIS HAS NOW SPARKED A NEW ROUND OF CRITICISM, LED SURPRISINGLY, BY AN EDITORIAL IN THE NORMALLY APOLITICAL "EL COMERCIO" ON MAY 3RD SAYING "ANTI-TOTALITARIAN GOVERNMENTS NEED TO RESPECT THE RIGHTS OF THEIR OPPOSITION.

IF THE OPPOSITION COMPORTS ITSELF WITHIN THE LIMITS OF THE LAW, IT CANNOT BE A THREAT TO STABILITY AND ORDER, WHICH IS THE ONLY DUTY THE GOVERNMENT MUST DEFEND. THE IMPRISONMENT OF CONSERVATIVE PARTY DIRECTOR TRUJILLO IS INDEFENSIBLE." OTHER POLITICAL FIGURES INCLUDING TWO OF THE MOST RESPECTED, ASSAD BUCARAM, LEADER OF THE CONFEDERATION OF POPULAR FORCES AND FRONT-RUNNER IN THE ABORTED 1972 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS, AND FRANCISO HUERTA, RESPECTED YOUNG ECONOMIST AND LEADER OF THE LIBERAL PARTY, HAVE COME OUT INTO THE OPEN IN CRITICIZING THE GOVERNMENT'S ACTION. WE HAVE NOW (MAY 6TH) EVEN BEEN TREATED TO THE SPECTACLE OF A PUBLIC LETTER BY THE WIFE OF ALFONSO ROBELLY (JAILED FORMER MINISTER OF NATURAL RESOURCES IN THE LAST CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT) ADDRESSED TO MRS. TRUJILLO IN WEEPY TONES ("EVEN THOUGH I HAVE NOT MET YOU, WE ARE UNITED IN THE SAME SORROW -- THE ABSENCE OF OUR HUSBANDS FROM OUR HOMES...") AND IN A PARTICULARLY BITING JAB AT GOE MINISTER OF GOVERNMENT RADM POVEDA, MRS. ARROYO DESCRIBES HIM AS A MAN WHO "MUST FIRST PROVE TO US THAT HE IS NEITHER AN ACCOMPLICE NOR A PROTECTOR OF TRAFFICKERS IN THE WORST MENACE FOR OUR YOUTH -- DRUGS." (THIS IS A REFERENCE TO THE RECENT NEW YORK TIMES SERIES ON DRUG TRAFFICING IN WHICH POVEDA IS ALLEGED TO HAVE COVERED UP FOR A TRAFFICKER. SEE QUITO 2811).

6. AS THINGS STAND NOW, OPPOSITION SNIPING IS LIKELY TO CONTINUE INTO THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE, ALTHOUGH PERHAPS SOMEWHAT INHIBITED BY GOE TACTICS OF SELECTIVE HARASSMENT. FOR ITS PART, THE GOE DOES NOT YET APPEAR SERIOUSLY THREATENED SINCE CONFRONTATION HAS THUS FAR BEEN A RELATIVELY COHESIVE MILITARY LEADERSHIP AND A GROUP OF TRADITIONAL POLITICIANS WITH A VERY NARROW POWER BASE. THE DISTINCT POSSIBILITY REMAINS, HOWEVER, THAT BREAD AND BUTTER ISSUES (WAGES, OIL POLICY AND ECONOMIC MANAGEMENT IN GENERAL) CONFIDENTIAL

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COULD DEVELOP INTO SIGNIFICANT NATIONAL PROBLEMS OVER THE NEXT 6-12 MONTHS, AT WHICH POINT THERE MIGHT BE A SUBSTANTIALLY GREATER CONVERGENCE OF INTERESTS IN OPPOSITION TO THE PRESENT REGIME. HEMENWAY

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